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FEBRUARY

VOL.  
26

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All the Year Round  
a  
Weekly Journal

CONDUCTED BY



CHARLES DICKENS

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"HOUSEHOLD WORDS"

PART 147

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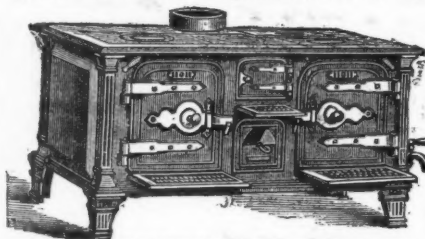


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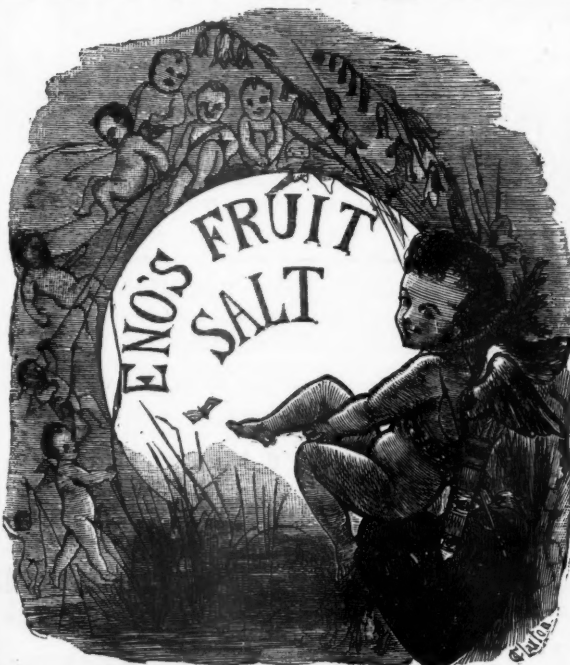
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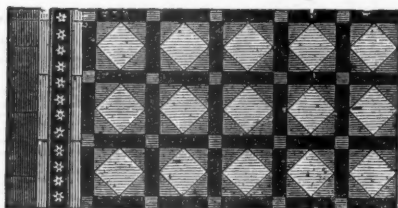
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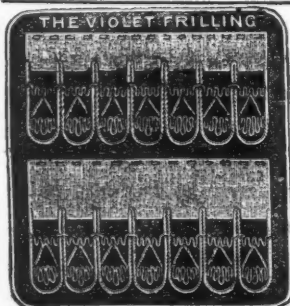
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"HOUSEHOLD WORDS"

No. 636. NEW SERIES.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 1881.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

## ASPHODEL.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "VIKEN," "LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," ETC.

CHAPTER XXVIII. "LOVE IS NOT OLD, AS WHAN THAT IT IS NEW."

SIR VERNON'S party had sailed over the smiling waters of Thun, with its villa-dotted shores, and its low amphitheatre of pastoral hills which form the foreground to the sublimer mountain land. They and all their belongings had been carried into Inter-laken by the funny little railway across the Bodelei, that fertile garden-ground between two lakes, which has such an obvious air of having begun life under water. They had seen the long rank of prosperous-looking omnibuses waiting for travellers, and in one of those vehicles they had been carried away from the walnut-tree boulevard, and all the gaiety and fashion of Interlaken, to a rustic road ascending the hill towards the pine-woods, and the mountain peaks faraway beyond them piled up against the edge of the sky.

Here at the Jungfraublick they found a charming suite of rooms prepared for them, rooms not gorgeously furnished or richly ornamented, but with long French windows which looked upon as fair a landscape as the eye of man could desire to behold. There rose the Jungfrau in her sublime beauty, above the fertile valley with its lake and meadows, its chalets and gardens, orchards and bosquets; all the simplicity and prettiness of Nature on a small scale lying at the feet of the immensities.

It was twilight when they arrived, and the first star of evening, a faint luminous spot in the blue-grey, hovered above the snowy pinnacle of the mountain.

"Oh, you dear!" cried Daphne, to the

mountain and not to the star; "you will be a part of my life from this night. How shall I ever live without you when I go back to Warwickshire?"

"You will have to console yourself with an occasional glimpse of the Wrekin or the Cotswolds," said Madoline, laughing.

"I am almost sorry I ever came to Switzerland," said Daphne, turning away from the open window with a sigh, when she had gazed, and gazed, as if she would fain have made herself a part of the thing she looked at.

"Why, dearest?" asked Lina.

"Because I shall always be longing to come back here. I shall never be able to tolerate the eternal flatness of home; mole-hills instead of mountains."

"Hawksyard is rather flat, I admit," said Edgar apologetically; "but it is remarkably well drained. There isn't a healthier house in England."

"Will not all their modern æstheticism—their Queen Anne worship; their straight garden walks, and straight-backed chairs; their everlasting tea-trays, and Japanese screens, and sunflowers, and dadoes—sicken you after this mountain land?" cried Daphne. "Such a narrow, petty, childish idea of beauty. Have these perpendicular people ever seen the Jungfrau, do you suppose?"

"Seen her, and outlived her, and ascended to a higher empyrean of art," answered Gerald. "You poor child, do you know that you are going into raptures about things which a well-bred person would hardly deign to mention, any more than a Pytchley man would stoop to talk about the Brighton Harriers? This is cockney Switzerland, as cockney as the Trossachs, or Killarney, as Ramsgate and Margate. Everybody knows the Jungfrau, at least by



sight; everybody has been at Interlaken. It is the chief rendezvous of the travellers who come in flocks and are driven from pillar to post like sheep, with an intelligent interpreter playing the part of sheep-dog. I hope you will do the Matterhorn and Monte Rosa before you go home; and then you will be acquainted with a brace of mountains which may be spoken about in polite society."

"The Jungfrau is good enough for me," answered Daphne; "I shall never behold anything more beautiful. Manfred loved it."

"I beg your pardon, that amiable gentleman did not love anything. 'And you, ye mountains,' he exclaims, 'why are ye beautiful? I cannot love ye.' He does not care for the sun, nor for his fellow-men, nor for his own life. He has all the misanthropy of Hamlet, without Hamlet's unselfish reasons for being misanthropic. However, I suppose to young ladies in their teens he will always appear an interesting character. No doubt you will be starting with your alpenstock at daybreak to-morrow in search of the witch of the Alps. You will most likely discover her by one of the bridges on the road to Grindelwald, offering dirty bunches of edelweiss, or indifferently fresh milk, to the passers-by."

"Daphne is going nowhere without me," said Lina, laying her hand caressingly upon her sister's shoulder. "She is too enthusiastic to be trusted in strange places. You will not go anywhere alone, will you, darling?"

"I will do nothing in this world to vex you," answered Daphne earnestly, with the straightest, clearest look in her lovely eyes.

Gerald Goring heard her tone, and saw that direct and truthful gaze. He knew well how much that little speech meant; how grave and complete was the promise in those few words. Yes, she would be true, she would be faithful: were it at the cost of two broken hearts. He began to perceive that he had underrated the moral force of this seemingly volatile creature; physically so fragile, so made up of whims and fancies; yet, where honour and affection were concerned, so staunch.

Later in the evening, after they had dined, and Sir Vernon had retired for the night, Mr. Goring loitered alone in the terraced garden of the hotel. The mountain, faintly touched with silvery light from a young moon, rose in front of him, and below glimmered those earthlier lights which told of human life: yellow candle-light in wooden châteaux; the flare of the gas yonder, faint

in the distance, where the walnut-tree walk was all alive with the light of its hotels, and its modest Kursaal. A fitful gust of music from the band came floating up the valley. Behind him the hotel stood out whitely against a background of dark pine-woods—lights in many windows. Those ten lighted windows in a row on the first storey belonged to Sir Vernon's apartments. He looked up, vaguely wondering which window belonged to Daphne's room. That one, at the end of the range, most likely—the window wide open to the night and the mystic mountain-land. While he was deciding this, a white-robed figure stepped lightly out upon the balcony, and stood there, gazing at the faraway peaks faintly outlined against a purple sky.

There were three or four other loungers upon the terrace, each with his cigar, the luminous point of which gleamed here and there among the bushes like a glow-worm. There was no reason why Daphne should distinguish him from the rest, as he sat in an angle of the stone balustrade, half hidden in the shadow of an acacia, lonely, dissatisfied—yet it was painful to him, in his egotism, to see her standing there, immovable, a lovely statuesque form, with upturned face, and clasped hands, worshipping the blind, dumb, unresponsive goddess Nature, and all unconscious that he, her lover, with a human heart to feel and to suffer, was looking up at her with passionate yearning from the dewy darkness below.

"She does not care a jot for me; she is harder than the nether mill-stone," he said to himself savagely. "Yet I once thought her the softest, most yielding thing in creation—a being so impressionable that she might be moulded by a wish or a thought of mine. I feared the touching of our spirits, as if I were flame and she tinder. Yet our souls have touched, and kindled, and burst into a blaze, and she has strength of mind to pluck herself away unscathed, not a feather of her purity scorched, from that fiery contact."

He sat in his shadowy corner, lazily finishing his cigar, and looking up at the figure in the balcony till it slowly melted from his gaze, and a muslin curtain was dropped across the open window. Then he left the garden, and wandered away up the wooded hill-side by narrow winding paths, which seemed to have no particular direction, but to have been worn by the foot-prints of other idlers as purposeless—it might be as unhappy—as he. He stayed in the shadowy wood for a long time, smoking



a second cigar, and preferring that perfumed solitude, and his own gloomy thoughts, to any diversion which the little lighted town down in the great hollow yonder could have furnished him. And then, at last, on the verge of midnight, when all the lighted windows of the Jungfraublick had gone out one after another, and the big white barrack looked all blank and bare, he turned and groped his way back to it through the sinuous woodland ways, and was admitted by a sleepy porter, who was mildly reproachful at having been kept up so long.

A grand excursion had been planned for the next day, Sir Vernon approving the scheme, and politely requesting to be left out of it.

"You wouldn't know what to do with me," he said. "I should be a burden to you, and I should be terribly tiresome to myself. I have letters to write which will occupy me all the morning, and in the afternoon I can stroll down to the Kursaal, or sit in the garden here, or take a little walk in the wood. You will be back before nine o'clock, I daresay."

Madoline was loath to leave her father for so long a day. He was an invalid, and required a good deal of attention, she reminded him.

"There is Jinman, my dear; he can do all I want. Of course it is much pleasanter for me to be waited on by you; but Jinman is very handy, and will serve on a pinch."

"But all those letters, dear father," urged Lina, looking at an alarming bundle of business-like documents. "Could I not help you with those? Could not the greater part of them stand over till we are at Montreux?"

"Some of them might, perhaps; but some must be answered to-day. Don't worry yourself about me, Lina; I know you have set your heart upon going up to Mürren with Daphne."

"I should like to show her the scenery which delighted me so, years ago," answered Lina; "but I can't bear the idea of leaving you for so long."

"My dear child, you are talking nonsense," said Sir Vernon testily. "In October you are going to leave me altogether."

"Yes; but I shall not be leaving you in a strange hotel, and I shall be so near, at your beck and call, always."

Sir Vernon having made up his mind to the sacrifice, carried it out with consistent fortitude. He himself ordered the carriage

which was to carry off his beloved daughter, with those other three who were comparatively indifferent to him.

They drove away from the hotel immediately after a seven o'clock breakfast, in the clear light of morning, while the fields and hedges were still dewy, and the earth wore her fairest, freshest colours, and breathed out her sweetest odours. Soon after they left the village they came to the road beside the deep rapid Lutschine river, which cleaves the heart of the valley. On either side rose a lofty wall of hills, slope above slope, climbing up to heaven, clothed to the very summit with tall feathery firs, some of stupendous size, the sombre tints of these patriarchs relieved by the tender green of the young larches; the white Lutschine rushing on all the while, a wild romantic stream, tumbling and seething over masses of stone. Here by the river bank they stopped to see the murder-stone, an inscription cut on the face of the rock, which tells how at this spot a brother slew his brother.

It is a lovely drive, so lovely that it is hardly possible for the mind to be distracted from its fairness by any other thought. Daphne sat silent in her corner of the carriage, drinking in the beauty of the scene, her gaze wandering upward and upward to those mighty hills, that forest upon the edge of heaven, so remote, so inaccessible in their loveliness, the greenery pierced every here and there by narrow streamlets which came trickling down like wandering flashes of silvery light. Solitude and silence were the prevailing expression of that exquisite scene. The cattle had all been removed to the upper regions, to remote pastures on the borderland of the everlasting snow-fields; of human life there were few signs, only a distant chalet showing here and there, perched on some ledge of the green hills. The voice of the river was the one sound that broke the summer stillness.

There was a pleasant contrast to this solemn loneliness, this silent loneliness of Nature without humanity, when the carriage drove jingling up to the Inn at Lauterbrunnen, where there was all the life and bustle of a country inn at fair-time, or market. Many vehicles and horses in the open space in front of the house; a long verandah, under which travellers are sitting resting after an early morning tramp from Mürren or Grindelwald; guides, with swarthy sunburnt faces, homely, good-natured, un-intelligent, sitting at ease upon

a long stone parapet, waiting their chances; a great fuss and noise of taking horses in, and bringing horses out; a call for hay and water; a few people strolling down the road to look at the Staubbach, and telling each other admiringly, inspired by the prophet Baedeker, that it is the highest unbroken fall in the world. It was very glorious in the morning sunshine, a dim rainbow-tinted arc of spray; and Daphne thought of the witch of the Alps, and how she had worn this cloud-like fall as a garment, when she showed herself to Manfred. There was no Inn there in those faraway romantic days—no odour of bad brandy and worse wine; no tourists; no cockneyism of any kind—only the sweet pastoral valley in its lonely beauty, and the solemn regions of mountain and snow rising whitely above its placid greenery, and walling it in from the commonplace earth.

There was a halt of half an hour or so at Lauterbrunnen, just long enough to pay proper homage to the Staubbach, and to explore the queer little primitive village, and for Daphne to burden herself with a number of souvenirs, all more or less of a staggy, or goaty order, bargaining sturdily for the same with the sunburnt proprietor of a covered stall opposite the Inn, whose honesty in no case demanded more than thrice the amount he was prepared to accept. By the time Daphne had concluded her transactions with this merchant of mountain bric-à-brac, and had made herself spiky with paper-knives and walking-sticks of the horny kind—which treasures she reluctantly surrendered to the safe keeping of an Inn servant, to be packed in the carriage against her return—the steeds were ready to convey the two ladies up the mountain path, the gentlemen being bent upon going up on foot. Daphne wanted to walk, and had just bought herself an alpenstock with that view, but Lina would not allow her to undertake the journey; so she handed Edgar her alpenstock and was hoisted into a queer kind of saddle, with a railing round it, and Lina being similarly mounted, they began the ascent, going through more mud, just at starting, than seemed compatible with such perfect summer weather.

"I hope, Edgar," said Daphne gravely, "that you won't take your idea of my horsemanship from my performance on this animal, and in this saddle, or else I am afraid you'll never let me ride Black Pearl."

Edgar laughingly assured her that her seat was perfection, even in the railed-in

saddle, and that she should have the best horse money could buy, or judgment secure.

The two young men went on before them, leaping from stone to stone, and making great play with their alpenstocks as they bounded across the streamlets which frequently intersected their path. It was a narrow, narrow way, winding up the shoulder of the hill, now in sunlight, now in shade; the summer air sweetened with the scent of the pine-trees; pine-clad slopes above, pine-clad slopes below, sometimes gently slanting downward, a green hill-side which little children might play upon, sometimes a sheer descent, terrible to the eye; chalets dotting the meadows far below; villages spread out on the greensward of the valley, and looking like clusters of toy houses; the road winding through the valley like a silver ribbon; the awful Jungfrau range facing them as they ascended in all its unspeakable majesty, grander, and yet ever grander, as they came nearer it.

Sometimes, as they rode through the pine-trees, they seemed to be riding straight into the snowy mountains; they were so close, so close to that white majesty. Then as they came suddenly into the open, those airy peaks receded, remote as ever, melting further and further away as one rode after them, like a never-to-be-reached fairyland.

"I could almost cry with vexation," exclaimed Daphne after one of those optical delusions. "I thought we were close to the Jungfrau, and there she stands smiling down at me, with her pallid enigmatical smile, from the very top of the world. Edgar, if you love me, you must take me up that impertinent mountain before I am a year older."

"You were talking yesterday of the Cordilleras."

"I know, but we must finish off the Alps first. Mont Blanc, and the Jungfrau, the Shreckhorn, the Rothhorn, the Matterhorn, the Finsteraarhorn, and all the rest of them. I cannot be defied by the insolence of Nature. She has thrown her gauntlet, and I must positively pick it up. If the mountain won't come to Mahomet—and the general experience seems to show that mountains are obstinate things—Mahomet must go to the mountain. I mean to have it out with Mont Blanc before I die."

"I don't believe a lady has ever done the ascent," said Edgar, leading his mistress's meek and patient steed along a winding ledge.

"That shows how densely ignorant you

must be of the age you live in. Be sure that there is nothing in this life which the man of the present can do which the women of the present won't imitate; and the more essentially masculine the thing is, the more certain she is to attempt it."

"But I hope you don't rank yourself among masculine women, Daphne," murmured Edgar, drawing protectingly near her, as they turned a sharp corner.

"I don't; but I mean to ascend Mont Blanc."

They were nearing the village on the height. The Lauterbrunnen Valley was sinking deeper and deeper into remoteness, a mere green cleft in the mountains. They had met and passed many people on their way: ladies being carried down by sturdy natives in a kind of sedan-chair, something of the palki species; voyagers struggling upwards with their belongings, with a view to spending some days in the quiet settlement among the snow-peaks; guides jogging by with somebody else's luggage; mules laden with provisions. The guides gave each other a grinning good-day as they passed, and exchanged remarks in a patois not very easy to understand: remarks that had a suggestion of being critical, and not altogether commendatory, of the clients at that moment under escort.

"Here we are, up in the skies at last," cried Daphne, as she sprang lightly to the ground, spurning her lover's proffered aid, and just brushing against the eager arms held out to receive her; "and, oh, how dreadfully far away the top of the Jungfrau still is, and how very dirty she looks now we are on a level with her shoulder!"

"It is too late in the year for you to see her in her virginal purity. A good deal of the snow has melted," said Madoline apologetically.

"But it ought not to melt. I thought I was coming to a region of eternal snow. Why, the lower peaks are horribly streaky and brown. Thank Heaven, the Silberhorn still looks dazzlingly white. And is this Mürren? A real mountain village? How I wish we were going to live here for a month."

"I fancy you would get terribly tired of it," suggested Gerald Goring.

She did not stay to argue the point, but ordered Edgar to explore the village with her immediately. The big wooden barrack of an hotel, with its bright green blinds and pine balconies, looked down upon her, the commonplace type of an advanced civilization. Young men, all affecting a

more or less Alpine Clubbish air, lounged about in various easy attitudes; young women, in every variety of hat and gauze veil, read Tauchnitz novels, or made believe to be sketching under very artistic-looking umbrellas. Daphne made but a cursory survey of this tourist population before she started off upon her voyage of discovery, with Edgar in delighted attendance on her steps. Madoline and Gerald, who both knew all that there was to be known about Mürren, were content to loiter in the garden of the Hôtel des Alpes, dreamily contemplative of the sublimities around and about them.

"I give you half an hour for your explorations," said Gerald, as Daphne and her swain departed; "if you are not back by that time, Lina and I will eat all the luncheon. At this elevation, luncheon is not a matter to be trifled with. There are limits to the supplies."

He went into the hotel to give his orders, while Lina walked slowly up and down one of the terraced pathways, looking at the wild chaos of glacier and rock before her, looking, yet seeing but little of that stony grandeur, caring but little for its origin or its history, with sad eyes turned inward, vaguely contemplating a vague sorrow.

It was not a grief of yesterday's date—it was a sorrow made up of doubts and cares which had their beginning in Gerald Goring's letter telling her of his intended trip to Canada. From that hour to this she had perceived a gradual change in him. His letters from the western world, kind and affectionate as they had been, were altogether different from the letters he had written to her in former years. When he came back the man himself seemed different. He was not less kind, or less attentive, less eager to gratify, and to anticipate her wishes. To her, and in all his relations with her, he was faultless: but he was changed. Something had gone out of him—life, spirit, soul, the flame which makes the lamp glorious and beautiful; something was faded and dead in him; leaving the man himself a gentlemanly piece of mechanism, like one of those victims to anatomical experiment from whose living body the brain, or some particular portion of the brain, has been subtracted, and which mechanically performs and repeats the same actions with a hideous soul-less monotony. "Was it that he loved her less, that he had ceased to love her?" she had asked herself, recoiling with shuddering heart-sickness from the thought, as if she had found herself suddenly on the



verge of some horrible abyss, and seen inevitable ruin and death below. No, she told herself, judging his heart by her own. A love that had grown as theirs had grown, side-by-side with the gradual growth of mind and body, a love interwoven with every memory and every hope, was not of the kind to change unawares to indifference. She was perfectly free from the taint of vanity, but she knew that she was worthy of her lover's love. She, who had been her father's idol, the object of respect and consideration from all about her, was accustomed to the idea of being beloved. She had been told too often of her beauty not to know that she was handsomer than the majority of women. She knew that in mental power she was her lover's equal; by birth, by fortune, by every attribute and quality, she was fitted to be his wife, to rule over his household, and to be a purifying and elevating influence in his life. His mother had loved her as warmly as it was possible for that languid nature to love anything. Their two lives were interwoven by so many ties in the past as well as in the present. No, it was not possible for Madoline, seeing all things from the standpoint of her own calm and evenly-balanced mind, to imagine infidelity in a lover so long and so closely bound to her. Those sudden aberrations of the human mind which wreck so many lives, for which no looker-on can account, had never come within the range of her experience.

Rejecting the idea of inconstancy, she was compelled to find some other reason for the indefinable change which had slowly been revealed to her since Gerald's last home-coming. What could it be except the languor of ill-health, or, perhaps, the terrible satiety of a life which had so few duties, and so many indulgences, a life that called for no effort of mind, for not one act of self-denial?

"Every man ought to have a career," she said to herself. "My poor Gerald has none; no ambition; nothing to hope for, or work for, or build upon. The new days of his life bring him nothing but old pleasures. He is getting weary and worn-out in the very morning of existence. What will he be when the day begins to wane?"

She had been thinking of these things for a long time, and had determined upon opening her mind to her lover, seriously, candidly, without reserve, with all the outspoken freedom of one who deemed herself a part of his life, his second self.

Here, in the face of those solemn heights,

which seem ever typical of the loftier aims of life—all the more so, perhaps, because of that air of unattainableness which pervades them—she felt as if they were more alone, further from all the sordid considerations of worldly wisdom than in the valley below. She could speak to him here from her heart of hearts.

He was walking by her side along one of the narrow paths, just where a rustic fence separated the grounds of the hotel from the steep mountain-side; walking somewhat listlessly, lost in a dreamy silence, when she put her arm gently through his and drew a little nearer to him.

"Gerald, dearest, I want to talk to you—seriously."

He turned suddenly, and looked at her with more of alarm in his countenance than she had anticipated.

"Don't be frightened," she said with a sweet smile. "I am not going to be severe. I am only anxious."

"Anxious about what?"

"About you, dear love; about your health, mental and physical. You remember what you told me before you went to Canada?"

"Yes."

"Your trip did you good, did it not?"

"Worlds of good. I came home a whole man."

"But since you came home the old feeling of languor has returned, has it not? You take so little interest in life, you look at everything with such a weary indifferent air."

"My dearest, do you expect me to go into raptures with the beaten tracks, and cockney lions of Switzerland, as poor little Daphne does? There is not a yard of the ground we have been passing over that I do not know by heart—that I have not seen under every condition of atmosphere, and in every variety of circumstances. You forget how many months of my life I wasted in balancing myself upon razor-edged arrêtes, and hewing my way up perpendicular peaks with an ice-axe. I cannot gush about these dear old familiar mountains, or fall into an ecstasy because the lakes are bluer and broader than our Avon."

"I don't expect you to be ecstatic, dear; I only want to know that you are happy, and that you take a healthy interest in life. I have been thinking lately that a man in your position ought to have a public career. Without public duties the life of a very rich man must inevitably be idle, since all his private duties are done by other people.



And an idle life never yet was a happy one."

"Spoken like a copy-book, my dearest," answered Gerald lightly. "Well, I own I have led an idle life, hitherto, but some of it has been rather laborious idleness; as when I accomplished the passage of the Roththal Sattel and ascended the Jungfrau between sunrise and sundown; or when I came as near death as a man can come, and yet escape it, in climbing the Pointe des Ecrins, in the French Alps."

"I want you, by-and-by, to think of another kind of labour, Gerald," said Lina with tender seriousness, "I want you to think of doing good to your fellow-men—you, who are so gifted, and who have the means of carrying out every benevolent intention. I want you to be useful in your generation, and to win for yourself one of those great enduring names which are only won by usefulness."

"Come now, my sweetest monitor, there you shoot beyond the mark. Surely Virgil and Horace, Dante and Shakespeare, have won names of wider glory than all the useful men who ever lived. That idea of usefulness has never had much charm for me. I have not a practical mind. I take after my mother, who was one of the lilies of the field, rather than after my father, who belonged to the toilers and spinners. If I had discovered in my nature any vein of the gold of poetry, I would have been willing to dig hard for that immortal ore; but as I can't be a poet, I don't care to be anything else."

"And with your talents, and your wealth, you can be content to be nothing," exclaimed Lina, deeply shocked.

"Nothing, except a tolerably indulgent landlord, a patron of the fine arts, on a small scale, and by-and-by, if you please—your—obedient—husband."

The last words came somewhat slowly.

"If you are happy, I am content," said Lina with a sigh, "but it is because I fancy you are not happy that I urge you to lead a more active life, to give yourself greater variety of thought and occupation."

"And do you think that, if I were unhappy, the wear and fret of public life, the dealing with workers whose chief object seems to be to frustrate and stultify each other's efforts; to be continually baulked and disappointed; to have my generous impulses ridiculed, my purest hopes cried down as the dreams of a madman; perhaps, at the close of my career, after I had given my days and nights, my

brain and body, to the public cause, to be denounced as an incendiary and a lunatic—do you think a career of that kind would ensure happiness? No, love; Providence in its divine wisdom has allowed me to belong to the lotus-eating class. Let me nibble my lotus, and lie at ease in my sunshiny valley, and be content to let others enjoy the rapture of the fray."

"If I could be sure that you were happy," faltered Lina, feeling very unhappy herself.

"Ought I not to be happy, when you are so good to me?" he asked, taking her hand and pressing it tenderly, with very real affection, but an affection tempered by remorse. "I am as happy as a man can be who has inherited a natural bent to melancholy. My mother was not a cheerful person, as you know."

This was an undeniable fact. Lady Geraldine, after having made what some people called a splendid marriage, and others a *mésalliance*, had gone through life with an air of subdued melancholy, an elegant pensiveness which suited her languid beauty as well as the colours she chose for her gowns, or the flowers she wore in her hair. She had borne herself with infinite grace, as one whose cup of life was tintured with sorrow, beneath the snowy calm of whose bosom the slow consuming fire of grief was working its gradual ravages. She died of an altogether commonplace disease, but she contrived so to bear herself in her decay, that when she was dead everybody was convinced she had died of a broken heart, and that she had never smiled after her marriage with Mr. Giles-Goring. This was society's verdict upon a woman who had lived an utterly selfish and self-indulgent life, and who had spent fifteen hundred a year upon her milliner.

Lina and Gerald strolled up and down for a little while, almost in silence. She had said her say, and nothing had come of it. Her disappointment was bitter; for she had fancied that it needed but a few words from her to kindle the smouldering fires of ambition. She had supposed that every man was ambitious, however he might allow his aspirations to be choked by the thorns of this world, and here she had found in the lover of her choice a man without the faintest desire to achieve greatness, or to do good in his generation. Had he been such a man as Edgar Turchill, she would have felt no surprise at his indifference to the wider

questions of life. Edgar was a man born to do his duty in a narrow groove; a large-hearted, simple-minded creature, but little removed from the peasant who tills the fields, and whose desires and hopes are shut in by the narrow circle of village life. But Gerald Goring—Gerald, whose ardent boyhood, whose passion for all the loftier delights of life, had lifted him so high above the common ruck of mankind—to find him at nine-and-twenty a languid pessimist, willing to live a life as selfish and as useless as his mother had led before him, this was indeed hard; and it was harder still for Madoline to discover how much she had overrated her own influence upon him. A few years ago a word from her had been sufficient to urge him to any effort, to give bent and purpose to his mind; but a few years ago he had been still warm with the flush and fire of early youth.

Daphne and Edgar joined them presently, both warm and breathless after a small experiment in the climbing way.

"We have seen everything, and we have been up a mountain," exclaimed Daphne. "It is the funniest little village—a handful of wooden cottages perched on a narrow track straggling along anyhow on the very edge of the hill; a little new church that looks as if it had dropped from the clouds; a morsel of a post-office; a stack of wood beside every house; and a bundle of green vegetables hanging to dry in every porch and balcony. Poor people, do they live upon dried vegetables, I wonder. We found an English lady and her son sitting in the middle of the road—if you can call it a road—sketching a native boy. He was a very handsome boy, and sat as still as a statue. We stood ever so long, and watched the two artists, and then we had a climb; and Edgar says I am a good climber. Do you think," coaxingly to Lina, "we might try the Silberhorn after luncheon?"

They lunched in a sunny airy corner of the big bare *salle-à-manger*, merrily enough, or with that seeming gaiety of heart which brightens so many a board, notwithstanding that the stream flows darkly enough below the ripples and the gleam. Daphne had made it the business of her life to seem happy and at ease ever since that fatal night at Freiburg. She wanted Gerald Goring to believe that she was satisfied with her lot—nay, even that she was honestly attached to her plighted husband, and that her conduct that night had been

but a truant impulse, a momentary aberration from good sense and duty. She was fighting her battle bravely, sometimes smiling with an aching heart, sometimes really succeeding in being happy with the inconsiderate unreasoning happiness of youth and health, and the rapture of living in a world where all was alike new and beautiful.

After luncheon she went out with Edgar for another ramble, until it should be time to begin the descent to Lauterbrunnen. They had all agreed to walk down, in a leisurely way, after tea, and the horses had already gone back with the two men who had led them up. Daphne wanted to learn where and how she could get nearest to the mountains. It seemed provoking to see them there, so near, and yet as far beyond her reach as if she had been looking at them from her window at Interlaken.

"Would it really be too much for an afternoon walk?" she asked, gazing longingly at the Silberhorn.

Gerald explained the preparations, and the assistance, and the length of time which would be required for any attempt upon that snowy crest.

"Please show me the very ledge where the child's red frock used to be seen," she asked, perusing the wilderness of crag and peak.

"What child? what frock?" asked Edgar.

"Don't you know that, ever so many years ago, a lammergeier carried off a child from this village of Mürren, and alighted with it upon an inaccessible shelf of rock on the side of the Jungfrau, and that for years afterwards some red scraps, the remnants of the poor baby's clothes, were seen amongst the snow."

"A pitiful story, wherever you found it," said Gerald; "but I think the baby's frock would have been blown away, or buried under the snow, before the vulture had forgotten the flavour of the baby."

And then, seeing that Daphne hungered for any information about yonder mountain, he condescended to tell her how he and a couple of friends, allied by the climbing propensity rather than by any ancient friendship, had ascended the north face of the Silberhorn, with the idea of finding a direct route over its summit to the top of the Jungfrau; how after ten hours of very hard work they had planted their feet on the top of the Silberhorn, only to find the snow falling thickly round them, and the Jungfrau, and the Giessen glacier already hidden behind a fleecy cloud; how, after

waiting in vain for the storm to pass, they had made a perilous descent to the upper plateau of the Giessen glacier; and how there, amidst thick clouds and driving snow, they groped their way round the edges of huge crevasses before they hit upon a practical path descending the ice-fall; and how, finding the night closing in upon them, they were fain to sit upon a ledge of rock under a sheltering cliff till daybreak.

"Poor things," exclaimed Daphne with infinite compassion; "and you never reached the top of the Jungfrau after all."

"Not by that way. I have scaled her granite point from the Roththal Sattel."

"And is it very lovely up there?"

"C'est selon. When I mounted, the maiden was wrapt in cloud, and there was no distant view, nor could we spare more than a quarter of an hour for rest on the summit; but we saw an avalanche or two on our way, and altogether we had a very good time."

#### LONDON BOARD SCHOOLS.

CONSIDERING its comparative youth, the School Board for London is an exceedingly well-abused public department. The sins of omission and commission laid to its charge are too numerous to be mentioned. Among these sins, however, has never been numbered the one which is generally held to be the badge of all the tribe of public boards. Friend has never reproached the School Board with, or foe accused it of, practising the art of how not to do it, in respect to the work appointed to it to carry out. It is denounced, not for the masterly inactivity so often alleged against boards, but for being masterfully over-active. The chief complaint against it is that it has shown itself too energetic, that it has done, and is doing its work, not wisely, but too well. That the School Board has been active cannot be gainsaid. Nor has its energy been of the spasmodic kind proverbially attributed to the metaphorical new-broom; its rapidity of execution in carrying out its work has been steady and sustained. Whether or not it has also been in any degree unwise is a point that need not be discussed for the purposes of the present paper. The outward and visible signs of this activity are the schools belonging to the board, which throughout the metropolitan area now number upwards of three hundred. Some of them are old public elementary schools, which have come into the possession of the

board by transfer, and have been altered by the board to bring them up to the later requirements of school accommodation. But the majority of the schools are new buildings erected by the board itself. These latter, which may be called the board schools proper, are familiar features of the street architecture of the great metropolis. As the material embodiment of "the board policy," they have been greatly discussed. The "policy" party among the public look upon them with a feeling of triumph, while to the opponents of that party they are in the nature of an eye-sore. Having regard to their purpose, and to the results to which it is hoped and expected the carrying out of that purpose will lead, the "contents" assert that the outlay upon these schools is one of the best investments that the country has made for many a long day. On the other hand, the "non-contents" denounce the buildings as flagrant instances of extravagant expenditure. However this may be, the schools are accomplished facts. They are the schools of the day, and for at least two or three generations to come are destined to be the schools of the future. In their distinctive capacity as educational institutions, as the newest departure in practical educational machinery, we cannot but think they are well worthy of description; and to give some account of them in that special and important connection is the object of this article.

As all schools under the London board are organised upon one and the same system, their general characteristics can perhaps be best shown by the method of taking a single illustrative example. The one here selected as such example need not be specifically named. Suffice it to say it is thoroughly representative. It is neither the best that might be selected as a show school, or the worst as exhibiting the difficulties with which the board has to contend. It is medium as to size, fee charged, and class of children attending it. It is situated in a strictly working-class neighbourhood—a neighbourhood of which the élite of the inhabitants are artisans, while the "lower orders" consist of unskilled labourers in the building and iron trades, dock labourers, a large sprinkling of the more nondescript class who speak of themselves as "cas'alty" men, and a considerable number of sea-going folk. The school is one of the largest buildings in the district. In fact, with the exception of the churches and a few public-houses, it is quite the largest building of



which the district can boast. It towers boldly over surrounding private houses, even without the aid of its rather steeple-like belfry; and though placed in a thickly-populated quarter, stands comparatively isolated by its own play-grounds. These play-grounds, it may be mentioned, are between and after school-hours open to all children irrespective of what schools they may attend. They are thus a boon, not only to the youngsters of the vicinity, but also to their parents. When the children are in the grounds they are safe from the parent-dreaded van-demon. Mothers and fathers are relieved from any anxiety as to Johnny or Polly "getting run over," or falling into the canal which runs near. Nor need they fear the lesser danger of their "getting fighting." While in the play-grounds the children are under the charge of the care-taker of the school, and though they are allowed to enjoy themselves to any legitimate extent, and in any legitimate manner, they have to be upon their good behaviour. Except for such occasional accidents as will happen even in the best regulated schools, the children leave the grounds when play is done with garments untorn, and noses, eyes, and limbs in their normal condition—a state of things which is by no means a matter of course when children have to make the streets their play-ground.

In common with other schools built by the board, this one is in the Queen Anne style of architecture. Its chief features, structurally speaking, are plainness and substantiality. The only attempt at ornamentation—beyond whatever of ornament may be held to lie in the general design—is the running of an occasional row of bright red brick through the dull brownish-looking bricks forming the mass of the edifice. Solidity and strength are the things principally aimed at, the board earnestly and honestly endeavouring to justify in a material sense, as well as in other senses, the distinctive title of permanent, given to schools of their own construction. Within and without, in the furnishing and fittings, as well as in the shell of the building, this is a first consideration, and it is one which should in justice be borne in mind by those who are inclined to grumble at the first cost of board schools. With equal earnestness, and with a full sense of their responsibility in the matter, the board seek to secure the best possible sanitary arrangements in their schools. The buildings are liberally be-windowed, and windows and

fire-places are so fashioned as to act as regulating ventilators. The walls are kept fresh and wholesome by periodical renewals of their paint or colour-wash, and it is one of the duties alike of the head-teacher, and the local managers, to see that the care-taker duly carries out his primary duty of keeping the school thoroughly clean in other respects. Sinks, and the outer offices are systematically disinfected, and each department of the school—boys, girls, and infants—is provided with a usefully and strongly-fitted lavatory. The board is of course scrupulous in allowing the ten square feet per child which the Education Department has decreed shall constitute a "school place;" and seeing that their school-rooms have all high ceilings, the cubic as well as the superficial space is on a liberal scale. On the whole, therefore, it is putting the case mildly on this head, to say that the majority of children attending a board school are, when in school, under more favourable sanitary conditions than they are when in their own homes.

Our representative school provides accommodation for a total of seven hundred and eighty-three children; namely, two hundred and forty-three boys, two hundred and thirty-one girls, and three hundred and nine infants. It therefore contains seven thousand eight hundred and thirty square feet of school-room space, which is apportioned out to boys two thousand four hundred and thirty, to girls two thousand three hundred and ten, and to infants three thousand and ninety. The infants' department is upon the ground floor, the girls upon the second, and the boys upon the third. Each department has its own entrance and play-ground, and in each the accommodation is divided into two large rooms, each of which can again be divided into two by means of sliding partitions. As a matter of fact, they are generally used so divided, the prevailing opinion in the teaching profession being that the class-room system of education is the most effective. The fittings of the school are of the latest and most approved patterns. The old-fashioned long desk which seated its dozen or more children, and was often bolted down to the floor, has been quite discarded in favour of small, light, easily-movable desks. These are accurately proportioned to just seat comfortably two children each. They are arranged behind each other in rows, with a gangway left between each row for the teacher to pass up and down, so that he or



she can closely supervise the work going on. Most of the school work is done at the desks, and they are designed with an especial view to saving the children occupying them from any unnecessary or injurious physical strain or irksomeness of position. They are fitted with ink wells, and receptacles for slates and pens and pencils; and they are sloped at what is held to be the angle of comfort. The surface upon which the copy-book or slate is laid for working, is jointed with a patent hinge, by means of which one part of it can be turned up so as to form a reading-rest, upon which the book in use can be placed in such a position as obviates any necessity for rounding the shoulders or straining the eyes. The getting in and out of these desks is effected by a methodical series of movements which the children go through with remarkable precision. In this way a change of lesson is made or school dismissed with a celerity and absence of confusion that is really surprising when witnessed by a stranger for the first time. In the later methods of elementary education the black-board figures prominently, and each class-room in a board school is furnished with one of these appliances. The supply of lesson books and school stationery is fairly liberal, but not more than this. It is not, as is very commonly supposed, practically unlimited or indefinitely extendable at the will of teachers or managers. On the contrary, it is strictly regulated. The expenditure under these heads is limited to four shillings and sixpence per annum per child in regular attendance, and to keep up a good working supply under this financial condition a teacher has to look closely to his requisition-lists, and see that nothing is wasted. On the walls of the class-rooms are hung the maps, diagrams, and illustrations used in the school work. In addition to their strictly technical uses, these serve a very desirable purpose in giving relief to the eye. But for them the children would be faced by a dreary expanse of blank wall. Within the school there is no attempt at ornamentation, either decorative or structural. The walls of the class-rooms are plastered about shoulder high, the remaining ten or twelve feet up to the ceiling showing the unplastered brickwork. The plaster is painted one shade, and the brickwork another shade of neutral colour. In the harmony (or contrast) of these shades of colour a highly æsthetic person might possibly profess to see some specific

beauty, some artistic nocturne in dun and drab; but board school children are not highly æsthetic, and but for the relief afforded by such wall furniture as we are speaking of, the school walls would to them be dull and depressing indeed. The passages of the school are wholly unplastered, and the stone staircases are as plain as they can be made. How the idea ever got abroad that the board schools are fanciful temples of education, we are at a loss to understand. The interiors of the schools are a practical and conclusive refutation of any such notion. That the schools do cost large sums of money is true, but the money is certainly not spent in ornament.

Any article descriptive of a School Board school would not be complete without touching upon this question of cost, therefore we may state at once that the particular school we have here in view cost, in round figures, eleven thousand five hundred pounds. Of this sum, eight thousand four hundred pounds odd was for building, two thousand six hundred pounds odd for land, and three hundred and thirty pounds odd for furniture. This looks, and actually is, a goodly sum to pay for a single school. Yet, if all the circumstances bearing upon the point were fairly considered, we think the amount would not be held to be unjustifiably large. At any rate, we have little hesitation in asserting that even the most critical of "indignant ratepayers," having the account before him, would find it difficult to place his finger upon any material item of expenditure that could reasonably be denounced as extravagant.

The London board, in conducting their schools, go upon the principle of having the best available teaching power, and it follows, as and by a natural law, that they have to pay the best market prices for that power. Under the regulations of the board, a head teacher, in addition to his or her work of general supervision, counts for thirty children; each certificated assistant counts for sixty children, and each pupil teacher for thirty. So constituted, the staff of a board school is slightly above the minimum allowed by the Education Department. The proportions in which the staff of a board school is made up of certificated teachers and pupil teachers varies, and this variation slightly affects the total cost. In the school we are now speaking of, the teachers' salaries amount, roundly, to twelve hundred pounds a year. This, it seems to us, can scarcely be considered

an extravagant amount when it is borne in mind that nine hundred children are educated in the school: that being the "number on roll," which brings up the average attendance to the total accommodation. Moreover, against the expenditure under the head of salaries, rather than against any other item of school maintenance, should be placed the amount of the fees received from the children, which in this particular instance comes to about two hundred and fifty pounds a year. To leave no room for any possible charge of special pleading on this head, it should, however, be stated that, while these figures represent the total amount of the salaries paid by the board, they do not show the total amounts of the income derived by the teachers from their schools. Under the board, the Government grant on examination earned by the school is divided among the teachers. The head teacher takes half of the amount earned by his or her department, and the other certificated teachers engaged in the department divide the remaining moiety equally among them. The annual grant earned by our representative school generally comes out, roundly, at six hundred pounds, which is pretty equally distributed over the three departments.

The school hours are from nine till twelve in the morning, and from two in the afternoon till half-past four, for boys and girls, and four for infants. The board do all in their power to secure punctual and regular attendance. By means of the machinery of their compulsory bye-laws they put pressure upon absentees and irregulars, and by means of a system of prize-giving they seek to make the ways of punctuality pleasant and profitable. There are two calls of the attendance register, an early call and a closing call. After the latter, which allows three-quarters of an hour's grace, no child can be marked present. Those who are in their places to answer to the early call of the roll "get their red mark." Each child who makes ninety per cent. of red marks during the quarter receives a certificate-card to that effect, and two of these cards entitle the holder to a prize. The prize books are graduated in size and value according to the standards in which the children taking them are being educated, but even the least costly of them are pretty and interesting volumes. By means of this system a household that has three or four, or it may be more children attending a board

school, will in the course of a few years acquire what is for it quite a respectable little library. In many instances the parents read the prize books with as much delight as do the children, and in all cases they are equally proud of them. On the whole we should say there is no item of School Board expenditure which produces so large a return in moral effect as the outlay upon the prizes for punctual attendance.

Our illustrative school is, as we have said, a medium one, and the fees charged in it are on a medium scale, namely, twopence a week each for boys and girls, and a penny a week for infants. Penny board schools—that is to say, schools in which the fee is a penny a week all round and in every department—are designedly placed in the poorest quarters of poor neighbourhoods. They are attended almost exclusively by the children of the poorest classes, and therefore present very little variety in this respect. But in a twopenny school we get a "considerably mixed lot." Thus in our particular school some of the children are the sons or daughters of tolerably well-to-do tradespeople. Many are the children of regularly-employed well-paid artisans. Others are the offspring of unskilled labourers, or of "cas'alty" men, and a number belong to poor widows who work, as Hal-o'-th'-Wynd fought, for their own hand. Some of these women are in receipt of parochial relief, and in their cases the school fees of their children are paid by the guardians of the poor. In other cases, the poverty of the parents is such, that the School Board, after due investigation, have themselves remitted the fees of the children concerned. Some of the children appear veritable pictures of health; and, as a body, they look fairly well-fed and well-cared-for. But here and there among them, you will catch sight of a wan, worn, prematurely aged face, bearing the unmistakable brand of hunger-pinch upon it. The most generally noticeable differences in appearance presented by the children are, however, in the matter of dress. Numbers of them are relatively and figuratively speaking clad in purple and fine linen, while others are woefully ill-clad, and in particular, woefully ill-shod. During the early days of the School Board, much of the raggedness prevailing among the poorer children forced into the schools was of the "loop'd and window'd" order. But it is a pleasantly significant fact, that at the present time, the ragged garments are not things of shreds, but of patches.

They may have been much worn and much torn, but they are also much mended. The worst feature about them is their insufficiency for wet and inclement weather. Ill or well-clad, the children all show clean hands and faces. So much the school lavatories ensure, if need be, but the need in this respect is very much less nowadays than was formerly the case. At present it very rarely occurs that a child is sent to school with insufficiently washed hands and face.

Though the circumstances of many of their parents differ materially, the difference of position between the highest and the lowest of the children attending the school does not amount to a difference of caste. In the play-ground they mingle together freely. The poorest meet with no contumely on the ground of their poverty. Indeed, in playtime, the poorer children have often the "pull." The fact that they need have little fear about spoiling their clothes, frequently makes them leaders in the more active sports of the play-ground. When in class, the children are thoroughly under discipline. Everything is done decently, and in order, and according to system. There is nothing of harshness or terrorism in the methods by which the children are ruled. The question of corporal punishment is often raised in connection with board schools. As it is intimately associated with, and in fact is by many people regarded as a convertible term for the question of discipline upon which we are now touching, it may be as well to state how the matter stands. The regulation of the board as to corporal punishment is, that only the head teacher of a department is to administer such punishment, and that all cases of its administration are to be entered into a book provided for that purpose. This regulation is intended to act—and, as a matter of fact, does act—very restrictively. In the first place, no head teacher cares to be turned into a mere flogging-machine. Assistant-teachers quite understand this, and are chary of sending out children for punishment. In the second place, it is well known that not only in official quarters, but also in the profession, there is a strong feeling to the effect that the heaviness of the punishment-book is in inverse ratio to the goodness of the teacher. As a rule the cane is very little used in board schools. The desire and practice alike of board and teachers tend to reduce corporal punish-

ment in the schools to a minimum in the present, and pave the way to its possible total abolition in the future. As yet, it is held, the time has not arrived when it can be wholly abolished consistently with the interests of discipline. But while during school hours the children are held in strict submission, they are in no degree crushed or depressed in spirits. On the contrary, a charge almost universally made against them by those living in the immediate neighbourhood of board schools is, that they are not sufficiently tamed. And it must be confessed that there is some ground for this complaint. There is a considerable dash of the wild untamed steed manner about "school boarders" at "letting out" times. They literally as well as metaphorically kick up their heels. They come out with a rush, and giving vent to a good deal of seemingly meaningless whooping. The boys in particular are given to

Turning to mirth, all things of earth,  
As only boyhood can.

They will chevy a cat or dog, or one of their own number, with equal gusto. A drunken man or woman crossing their path is pretty sure to be baited, and they will dance round an organ-grinder in numbers, and with an energy and abandon, more than sufficient to satisfy him that you can have too much of a good thing. Despite the watchmen or workmen, they will penetrate into buildings in the course of construction, and play at follow-my-leader over the sand or mortar heaps, or up the unfinished staircases. They will assist with objectionable effusion at such street episodes as a row or "horse-down." Files of them will pass along rattling their sticks on area railings. They are not altogether guiltless of runaway knocks, and they linger about the roadways indulging in all manner of impish and rough-and-tumble games. After all, however, to make a very philosophical if not very original remark, boys will be boys; and to any one with a sense of humour in them, the letting-out time vagaries of board school children would on the whole probably be more amusing than annoying.

Any detailed discussion of the much-vexed question of the constitution and fitness of the School Board curriculum would not be germane to the present paper. As it stands, that curriculum is no doubt fairly open to criticism. But as it does stand it is the creation, not of the School Board, but of the Education Department.



Only one thing need be said about it here, and that is that it is by no means the highly pitched and many-stringed affair that numbers of good people imagine it to be. The list of "specific subjects" from which the two that may be taught have to be selected, is certainly a long and high-sounding one. But the subjects chosen are generally two of the simplest in it, and it is only permitted to teach them to children who have already made a fair degree of progress in the three Rs; who have, to put it technically, passed the third standard.

That the schools of the London School Board, like other mundane institutions, have their imperfections, may be readily admitted. That directly and indirectly they involve a large expenditure of rate-raised funds cannot be denied. Still, we venture to think that, even from what we have been able to say of them here, it will be seen that they are doing the great work appointed to them to do in a manner calculated to produce moral and social results which will, in the future, greatly over-pay whatever money cost may be necessarily incidental to their production.

#### TOWN BREAD AND COUNTRY BREAD.

In the year 1266, only two centuries after the Norman Conquest, Henry the Third had a request from "the bakers of our town of Coventry." Bread, up to that time, had been made of certain legal shapes, weights, and different regulated kinds. There was bread-wastel. It was the finest, white and palatable, the loaves weighing six pounds and sixteen sterlings. There was bread-cocket: for the household, not for the dais and above the salt: the loaves weighing rather more. There was bread in simnels; that is, in round lumps of dough, without any tin to mould it or any careful "setting;" each simnel weighing a little less. There was bread of treet—treet being the old word for wheat, from the Latin *tritium*; baked in loaves weighing twelve pounds and over, exactly twice the weight of the best—the wastel. And the bakers (of Coventry and elsewhere) were accustomed to these; so was the king; so were the people. But those reforming folks, who are always trying to bring improvements into everything, were even trying, six centuries ago, to bring improvements into this; and the bakers of our town of Coventry were troubled. Henry the Third—good king!—was willing to

ease them if he could, and took the shortest and most thoroughly conservative way. He looked into "certain ordinances of the assize of bread . . . made in the times of our progenitors sometimes kings of England;" and, having looked, he framed an ordinance of his own (known, in the Latin of it, as *Assiza Panis*, &c.), in which he ordered that the ordinance of his progenitors should thenceforth, under penalties, receive full obedience and attention.

The bakers were content. Bakers in those early days found the most part of their trade in taking in bread to bake. They were keepers of what were called common bakehouses or public ovens, charging so much for baking each stone of flour or "batch" of bread; from which it followed that it was not to their interest that dough should be made into loaves so small in size, that housewives could have them baked at home. Their bakeries, as they existed, were important things. It was worth a struggle that they should not fall into disuse. To them there flocked the Phebes of the day, the Audreys, the Jacquenettas, Mistress Touchstone, and Gillian, and Jen. These good folks all had their days for baking; they carried their dough up to the bakeries, and the whole gossip of the country was current within the precincts. A bakery, in fact, was a newsroom. Into its midst, as the women chatted, waiting for the ovens to be "drawn," came the rumours of foreign over-running, of counter-foreign landings, of Saxon resistance, of the stern realities of local risings and submission, of neighbouring revolts and despair. And as such town-ovens—unchanged, untouched, just as they were for Henry the Third to make an assize about—are lingering in existence down to the present day, one of them shall be looked for, and shall at once be entered.

It is here. In this part of the Midlands; where canals soak along, where poplars stand sentinel over clovered fields, where, at the back, lie the meadows, and, to the right, is the old Watling Street Road. It is in this town of Nuneaton; a town that sits low and flat, that has ruddy bricks, and two-storeyed houses, and blue "quarries" for decent foot-way; and shoals of cotton-bonneted weaver-women. Besides, from here it is only eight miles to the very Coventry whose bakers laid their grievances before the king. Even a thirteenth-century man could have footed eight miles with a light tread and gallantly; above all, for such a purpose as a memorial



to a king; and it may be considered certain that the thirteenth-century owner of the bakery at hand knew of the petitioning of his contemporary Coventry cousins, and journeyed over to put his cross to the parchment, supposing he was not clerk enough for more dignified sign-manual. And, as that thirteenth-century man lived in this squat little homestead, so does Hacket, the present baker, live here now, so does Mistress Hacket, the present bakeress, live here now; with the roof-top just able to hold itself together, with a fresh brushing of bright moonlight-blue wash, just sweetening, as well as hiding, the bulginess of the ancient inner walls. It is an alluring picture as it stands. To get in there is a straight entrance into the little room that serves as an open shop. It is an apartment some seven feet square, even upwards to the ceiling; for any one could touch its highest part with his open hand. This leads to a room that matches it, timber-beamed like it, as low and as obscure. It contains the good couple's cosy hearth, with its ample grate, a timber chair on each side of it, and a three-legged small round timber table drawn between, for their homely "board." Then beyond, still on the flat, is the bakery proper. It has a floor of rugged stone, years ago tramped out of the level, and never straightened; it has a small latticed window that points to Elizabethan adding, with its slender latch-fastenings and thin iron bar; it has its ceiling perforated with a ladder-hole as access to the loft, and furnished with beams and cross-beams that act as shelves and hanging-places, and are helped out in this utility by scores of jagged hooks. Around three of the bakery's four sides are wide deal tables, on which the Hackets carry on their craft, and which are delicately white now from freshly-sprinkled flour; whilst the fourth side consists of the oven itself, a small door by it leading to the yard.

"Noo, then," says Mistress Hacket, when there has been time to make these observations, "looke at t' maaster. That's glede he's a-takin' oop to put in. Glede. And he's a-goin' to put it in to her, herself; for the kindlin'."

The English of it, heard, perhaps, as Gower heard it, as Chaucer heard it, as even the baker-entreated King Henry the Third heard it, made the understanding not so easy; so might we look inside?

"A looke insoide?" Hacket himself echoed shortly. "A-ah! ye may looke in if ye have a moinde! Ye'll foinde some

heat!" With which he moved away, and made room contemptuously.

But his wife was much more politely wishful that we should understand.

"The foire, ye know," she explained, whilst the look was given, "were loighted two hours ago, and moore. It roons round at the back of her—a flue—and it heats her foine. That's done wi' faggots. A-ah, and a bit o' coole, nowadays. And coake. A hoondred o' coole'll do it; and we give sevenpence a hoondred, bein' so near the pits. That's arle."

"Then the glede——"

"A-ah, the glede's the hot coole; the red-hot coole. But for all o' the heat o' the flue all round, and the heat o' the foire inside, it'll be a whoile yet afore it's hot enoo for workin'. Toime's toime, and we must have it."

To which Hacket responded:

"A-ah," he said, "she wants a sounder heat, she do, than if we had had her hot yesterday."

Therefore, whilst the soundness was being waited for, and yesterday's omission supplied, there was opportunity for notes of another kind. The oven was cellar-shaped, the look into it had shown; that is, it was flat on the floor, and arched slightly at its roof. It was cellar-like again in being of bricks; bricks that were glowing-red already from Hacket's heating, and that were glowing and glowing every moment more. It measured ten feet in the square; with its fullest height rising only to a foot and a half, and this going down to the level (except in front) in a gentle slope. Its floor was not as low as the ground, nor near it. It stood as high as a baker's waist; so that a baker might set loaves in to it, and draw loaves out, without the extra labour of having to stoop. As for its capacity, it could take in at once as much dough as could be made up from two sacks of floor. It had a little square iron door, big enough to hand in wastel or cocket, sinnel or treet; and as it was time for Hacket to open this, a second peep took place.

The glow had become glorious; the light from the glede and faggot fine. It was so fine, there was quick withdrawal. There was too quick withdrawal; for even at the moment of it, Mistress Hacket gave a cry.

"The colly!" this was. "The colly! Moinde!"

Colly was soot, it was explained (from colliery, perhaps); colly was the thick

encrustation, hard or loose, that gets round pot-sides by burning, and consequently round the edges and ledges of the oven-door. The inadvisability of too near approach to the colly was admitted therefore, and another subject broached. How did t' maaster, it was, know when his oven was ripe for work?

It had to get to a white heat, Mistress Hacket revealed in her own Chauceresque. It had to get so red and red, its redness took fright, and presently grew pale. But t' maaster never opened the oven door to look for this. If he did, he would be parting with the heat by which he earned (as well as baked) his bread. Instead, he had a tiny eye-sized peep-hole in the small iron door, covered by what might have been a penny-piece, slung up by its rim. This flapped up, when Hacket raised it for seeing; this flapped down, when Hacket let it go, on his seeing being done; and it was not the least queer portion of the whole queer picture, to see t' maaster, after tilting the penny up, quickly let the penny tumble down, there being no whiteness yet to meet him, and he having still no labour but to wait.

Meanwhile, however, there is other matter. There is the dough; which is arriving by messenger after messenger, and which Mistress Hacket is on the alert to welcome in.

"Mornin', Steve," she says to a young boy.

He has rattled up to the front of the house with a very rattlesome barrow; he has lifted a great pillow-looking bundle from it; he has laboured with it through the shop and the inner room, and is now beginning to heave it up on to the bakery table, as well as he can, to let it sag itself down before the bakeress, shyly. She is surprised.

"What! your moother's a-bakin', Steve, is she?" she cried. "Why, I didn't know as this were her day. I set hers down to be to-morrow!"

Steve is much too shy for any comment.

He can neither explain nor refute, but that is of no consequence. Mistress Hacket has relieved him in a second of his heavy pillow, has lain it on the floured table with a hearty swing. Then she proceeds to untie a string at the pillow's neck; she turns the pillow topsy-turvy; she peels the little sack upwards curiously, letting the dough gradually out. All she has to do then is to give the little sack a vigorous shake, getting all the flour off it possible,

and letting the dough have that much of benefit; and then the boy reclaims the sack, and he is shyly gone.

The next customer is a boy, also; similarly staggering under his load, similarly doing his mother's errand with rustic and painful timidity.

"Eh?" cries Mistress Hacket to him, stooping down to get his dough.

He is trying to deliver a timid message, poor child! and delivering it as if he were altogether afraid it was too audacious, and would be sure to be refused.

"Ye want a bit o' croombs?" Mistress Hacket repeated after him; repeating it cheerily, to take his fear away. "A-ah! ye shall ha' a bit o' croombs, lad. I'll moinde."

It was that "moother" wanted it kept from being "croosty." That was the meaning, the good bakeress explained, as the boy, in better heart, disappeared. And she could accommodate people this way, she said; and always did, as far as she could: for t' maaster, he knew which liked "croomb," and which liked "croost," and he could place the loaves in the oven accordingly. Those that were all pushed up tight together had some of their sides crumbly; those that were on the edges of this mass had extra crust; whilst the reason that cottage bread was sold at a price a trifle dearer was that, having to have crust all round, they took up more room in the oven. A space had to be allowed round each loaf to let the crust come; this filled the oven quicker; consequently, as only a lesser number of loaves could be baked at the same cost for time and fuel, they had to be charged higher to meet it.

"But, dear, dear!" cried Mistress Hacket, breaking in upon this little technical harangue. It was on the appearance of a new customer, a slattern girl, bringing her consignment in a basket, and bringing it of the sort that was not in harmony with the bakeress's idea at all. So she was giving the dough an experimental pinch between her finger and thumb. She was giving it another pinch, and she was shaking her head.

"Where did yer moother get her baarm?"

"By Bet Greenhough's."

"How mooch were there of it?"

"A ha'aporth."

"A ha'aporth!"

It was good to see the bakeress's objection and disdain.

"And for that ha'aporth o' baarm," she cried, "she'll just lose aboov a loaf o'

bread! Ye never had such a bad hap as this afore. It'll be heavy now, ye see!"

The girl was gone; too conscious of shortcoming to be able to deny this prophecy of evil; and there came a tiny child.

"Make me a little loaf," she put up an appeal, tinily, as her bundle of dough was lifted out of her tiny arms.

"Make me two little loaves, please," came another appeal from another child a little bigger, in more sturdy fashion.

Mistress Hacket looked at him sharply.

"A-ah!" she cried, in sudden recollection. "It slipped out o' my moinde last week, so it did. All right, lad. I'll make three; for ye shaan't be missin' yer little loaf again. And I hadn't ought to ha' forgot it afore. I'll moinde."

And there came women. These had a neighbourly word as they deposited their dough upon the table; these had a neighbourly word from the bakeress in return, accompanied by a quick look up to see who each woman was, and where each placed her parcel, that it might be identified when each was gone. All this while, also, identification was going on in practical fashion. The townspeople in the habit of sending their dough to the Hacket's town-oven, had sent their initials, carved in wood, or wrought in metal as well, or had sent their crests, or any symbol by which they were willing to be known. These bread-stamps the Hackets kept in a handy box (as their predecessors had kept them); this box was turned to as the women came, the right stamp was selected from it, and each lump of dough received its seal of ownership as the stamp was patted on.

How was it, though, that all these women went away, after bringing in their dough, and did not stay for gossip as in the olden time? Mistress Hacket had excellent and reasonable explanation. She couldn't a-bear it; she had had enoo of it; she had no moinde to put up with it any more. The women got franziel very often; they got tale-bearin'; they made a loomp o' mischief, and a deal o' words; they would even coom to fists; and so she got frit, and then she got fritter, and fritter again, and she put it arle by. It was enoo for they to bring and to fetch; and when that were doon, she wanted to be shut.

Mistress Hacket also had her excellent and reasonable speech about some dealers' flour roonin' sloopgy, which was a defect, and about baarm, which drew out her praise.

"Give me baarm," she said. "True baarm; as ye can depend on. Bread made otherwise may be pooffed oop, but it ain't so substarntial."

And, not being so "substarntial," it was not for good Mistress Hacket at any price; she being substarntiality itself, and not having ceased one second from honest substarntial labour. T' maaster was helping her now, too, with a woman and a girl, who had quietly arrived and quietly begun their toil; for the moment was drawing near when the peep-hole would tell t' maaster that the white heat had come, and they were all putting out their strength to meet the mistress's, to prevent the delay, even of a second. Their business was to "set up" the bread. All along Mistress Hacket had been rapidly dividing the doughs into as many portions as each owner required (each portion stamped for recognition); but now, all in a hot hurry, these portions were to be "set up" into loaves (each loaf stamped again), in order that such setting-up or shaping might not lop over and lapse into non-shaping before the heat of the oven had fixed it. And it was charming to see how deft each hand was. Each rapidly took up one piece of dough, and rapidly pulled it into two unequal parts, then rapidly rolled and rounded the bigger part, and rapidly rolled and rounded the lesser part, then rapidly raised the lesser part as a head upon the bigger, gave it a "bashin'" (a kind of side blow), pushed it along the table the nearest to the oven's side, and rapidly took up another piece, to go through all the rapidity rapidly again. Before anything like all the dough was set-up into loaves, however, the little baker himself was at proper baker work. His oven had come to have as sound a heat in her as his tried judgment desired; he had taken a mop ("made o' bits o' baggin'," Mistress Hacket seized a moment to observe), and he had cleared his oven out of all glede and faggot, and the ash of them; he was steadily and sturdily, with his Saxon solidity and silence, filling his oven in. The far-corners of "her" first, of course; the corners that were ten feet back; and ten feet back through such fierce square heat, it was too fierce for any human being to have endured, even if any human arm had been constructed sufficiently long. So t' maaster, from his low ceiling of beams and cross-beams, and from out of the jagged hooks of it, had helped himself to a "pele." It was a wooden



shovel, with a handle six or seven feet long—with a philological pedigree eight centuries old, for certain, coming straight from its Norman ancestress, “a pelle”—and with it he slid in loaf by loaf, sliding his emptied pele out again, and he still slid in loaf by loaf, sliding his emptied pele out again, till, with his wife helping by shifting the loaves to a space within his reach, and with the woman and the girl helping by still setting loaves up at their fastest, that she might have loaves to shift, he quickly had his oven full, and he shut the door of “her” fast and close. That was the end of the matter; except that, after two hours about of baking, the oven being ready to be “drawn,” the pele would be slid in empty, the pele would be slid out full; each slide out would bring a hot loaf, with a reversal of the previous sliding in to fill; each hot loaf would be shifted along the deal tables by Mistress Hacket, the woman and the girl being there to help her shifting; and there they would remain till the several owners should come to carry them all away.

Three pence a stone is the price charged for setting up bread and baking it by good Master and Mistress Hacket. So the bakers and bakeresses, of this rural sort, all over the kingdom, gain but a poor living at their baking; and none of them are to be envied.

And now for a little word, as a preliminary to a conclusion. It may be remembered that the 1666 Fire began at the house of one Faryner, in Pudding Lane. Faryner was a tradesman who could have nailed up the Dume and Droy\* over his timber doorway, for he lived under royal patronage, being baker to the king. Says Pepys of him and his household: “The baker, son, and his daughter all did swear again and again that their oven was drawn by ten o’clock at night; that having occasion to light a candle about twelve, there was not so much fire in the bakehouse as to light a match . . . . that at that time the bavins were not on fire in the yard.” It is a good stepping-stone back, those four hundred years exactly, towards the Coventry bakers and the Assiza Panis of Henry the Third. The bakehouse is there, the oven and “her” drawing are there, the bavins (which is another word for faggots, and a dictionary word as late as William Richards the Welshman, and Bailey, and Baretti) are there, as well. Then here is a stepping-

stone again. It is in a statute enrolled by young Edward the Sixth. By that, bakers conspiring to sell at other than regulated prices were to be imprisoned for six days; were to be fed on bread and water; were to be pilloried; were to lose an ear; were to “become infamous.” And, before passing from this stringent piece of parental government versus Free Trade, an index-finger must be pointed to the imprisoned bakers’ food. As the Latin words of the sentence ran, it was to be Panis Fortis et Durus, meaning hard and dry bread, of barley, not wheat, and to have only the accompaniment of puddle-water. Stepping on, down towards modern days again, it shall be stated that James the First repealed an Act passed by Henry the Eighth about horse-bread (a composition of beans); that it was Queen Anne who finally blotted out the Coventry bakers by repealing the Assiza Panis of Henry the Third; that George the Second enacted that a large legible W should be stamped on every loaf of wheaten bread, that a large legible H should be stamped on every loaf of household bread, under a penalty varying from five shillings to a pound for every loaf that left a baker’s shop unstamped (unless, indeed, the stamp had been removed by rasping, at the purchaser’s wish, and after the loaf had been bought); and that George the Third, finding further strictures and selection needful, passed a law that the best quality of loaves should be known as standard wheaten, and that, to testify that they were such, each one should be stamped with the pair of initials S. W.

The laws in respect of bread have, it is evident, only been lightly touched upon in these few examples given. Stand-points were wanted, and there they are. Stand-points are to be found, also, in writers contemporary. Says Chaucer: “Of your white bread, a shiver” (a thin slice). Says Shakespeare: “Easy it is of a cut loaf to steal a shive.” Says Pullein (a physician writing in 1576): “Sodden bread, which be called simnels or cracknells, be verie unwholesome.” And there is the little loaf called a manchet. Says More, of it: “I love to entertain my friends with a frugal collection; a cup of wine, a dish of fruit, and a manchet.” Says Bacon, of it: “Take a small toast of manchet, dipped in oil of sweet almonds.” Says Mrs. Glasse, of it, almost within hearing: “To make a water-tansey, take half a manchet grated, or half a penny roll.” Bread also has furnished proverb and bye-word, adage and pert wit.

\* Dieu et mon droit.



Mrs. Uppercrust is a woman whose yeast, or "baarm," or some other inflating power, has risen her very high indeed. Crumbly and crusty are adjectives, applied to persons, very well understood. Say the Italians: "Egli è meglio del pane" ("He is the best of the bread"). Say the Italians, again: "Egli è un pan perduto" ("He is a good-for-nothing fellow"), a lost bread, or a heavy batch (perhaps from flour being slooggy, perhaps from restriction to a ha'aporth o' baarm). Say the Italians, once more: "L'allegrezza di pan caldo," meaning only a limited allegrezza, just as much as stale bread gives; not the full satisfaction of a hot roll, fresh off a pele, from an oven's mouth. There is excellent pith, too, in the English expostulatory remark: "It is unwise to eat your white bread before you eat your brown." With which this short peep into the bread question, middle-aged and modern, shall be ended.

## VISITED ON THE CHILDREN.

BY THEO GIFT.

### BOOK II.

#### CHAPTER V. "AND FAITH UNFAITHFUL MADE HIM FALSELY TRUE."

FOR nearly a minute Sybil let him have his way. There was no one within sight on the wide broken heath; no one near, only the bees humming round the furze-blossoms, and the lark's song shrilling in the blue above; and Sybil stood quite still, making no motion to repulse him, even when he covered her hair and hands, and the very ruffles at her little wrists, with worshipping kisses.

She was very unhappy, as she had said—she was sure of it—but, with Gareth's arm round her, and her face hidden against his shoulder, it was an unhappiness nearer heaven than earth, and earth seemed to fade away beneath it. She knew well that what she was doing would break Lionel's loyal heart, shock her mother and Jenny beyond all words, and make all the little world that knew her cry shame upon her name. But what were all these things, hitherto the most important in her life, to her? What was the world, or Lionel, what were even her mother and Jenny, compared with this man, Gareth Vane, and the supreme fact that he loved her? It might be that they would never let her see or speak to him again, that this was the last time they would ever stand hand-in-hand together; and, if so, would it not be useless sorrow

in after-years to look back to the thought that she had been cold or cruel to him in this the one hour of their hearts' union? She had never been used to arguing, or looking forward to the future; but love, the first real impassioned love of her life, had altered her whole nature in one moment, had turned her from a smiling, simple, tranquil-spirited girl into a woman, with all a woman's trembling foresight and keenly tender sensitiveness for the one nearest to her; and when Gareth asked her again: "Are you sure you love me, darling? Say it to me once more, that you love me, and me only, that you never loved that other man at all," her sweet low voice answered him as simply and earnestly as a child would have done:

"I love you; not as I ever loved anyone before. I did not know what love was till I knew you."

"And yet they would have made you marry that young parson. But you know it now, and you will not—swear it to me, child: you won't have anything to do with him. I can't bear to think that he holds you by even a nominal engagement."

"No, I will not marry him. I could not now. No, not even if they never let me see you again. But, oh, how angry he will be! How angry they will all be!" And she drew herself apart from him, and looked about her with a pale shivering glance. The angel with the fiery sword stood very near the gate of her Eden, after all. The shadow of his wrathful brow was even now upon her.

"What will they say to me when they know?" she murmured pitifully. "Mr. Vane, is it very wrong of me? I feel so treacherous and wicked; and yet—and yet it is not my fault."

"Of course it is not your fault," said Gareth, smiling cheerily into her troubled face as he took one of her hands and kissed it. He was in one of his most joyous moods, bright, tender, wilful, his face more beautiful than ever in the triumph of his victory. "It is the fault of those who forced you into an engagement with a man you never cared for. You are sure you never cared for him, Sybil?"

"I liked him, I was fond of him; but—oh! no, not like this," she interrupted herself, shuddering. "He was very good to me, however, always. Ah! dear, what will he think of me now?"

"Sweet, if we are to trouble about what everyone thinks of us, we should never do

anything or please anybody or have any pleasure in life at all. Tell Mr. Ashleigh that you've changed your mind, and refer him to me if he worries you."

"But mamma, Jenny," and poor Sybil's head drooped lower and lower. Her native timidity was overcoming her; and Gareth got half impatient. Now that the prize was his own he could not brook any hesitation in its allegiance.

"Jenny! Good Heavens, what has she to do with it! Are you sure after all that you do love me? No, don't look at me in that way. Give me your hands, both of them, and promise me that nothing anybody can say will shake you in your faith to me. What are their fancies and prejudices compared with the love and happiness of our whole life? Don't mind them, Sybil, and they'll come round all the sooner," and he laughed gaily, stroking the hand he still held as he walked by her side, and building castles in the air of their future life together, so bright and glowing, that by-and-by the roses came back into Sybil's cheeks; and when he parted from her there was even a smile upon the lips he kissed.

It was all very well, however, for Gareth to keep up her spirits while he was with her, but when he was gone, and she was left alone, the natural softness and weakness of her character, that weakness which had already made it easy to her to engage herself to Lion and then to break with him and bind herself anew to Gareth, reasserted itself; and though the latter did not leave her till she was positively within sight of the gabled roof and clustered chimneys of her own home, the short space which she had to traverse by herself might have been miles judging by the amount of fear, irresolution, and remorse which were crowded into it; and it says much for the strength of her love for Gareth that during the whole day, even when a sharp tone in her mother's voice, or an unconscious word from Jenny in reference to her approaching marriage, made her shake and flush and feel that death would almost be preferable to telling them of her change of mind, no thought of concealing it altogether, or of being faithless to Gareth in his turn, ever crossed her soul. She loved him, and she would be true to him, even if she never saw him again, and so far from there being any division of her thoughts between the two men, to both of whom she stood at present in the same position, Lionel might never have existed from her entire ignoring

of any grief or loss to him in the affair, her absolute want of tenderness, or even womanly feeling for the cruel blow to both his trust and love when he should hear of her infidelity. Like that erring knight of Arthurian romance, her

honour rooted in dishonour stood,  
And faith unfaithful kept her falsely true.

Of only two things she was quite sure: nothing should induce her to trust herself in his presence again, and no threats or persuasions should avail to make her unsay her love for Gareth.

Her mother and sister were more than usually tender and caressing to her that day, fearing that her pale cheeks and alternate languor and restlessness foretokened actual illness; but they avoided teasing her by comments or enquiries, and Sybil accepted their kindness in uneasy silence, conscious at every moment of how differently they would look and speak when they knew all; and feeling a half-incredulous wonder that she could be sitting there between them, she who had never had an existence apart or a secret of her own in her life, and they be ignorant of all that had taken place during the past twenty-four hours.

As usual, it was on Jenny that she placed her reliance. Jenny might disapprove—would disapprove; she knew that well enough—but she would never desert her; and she would stand between her and that pale-faced, fragile little mother, whose cold eyes and sharp lips had managed to inspire the child she so idolised with as much secret awe as love.

It was that same night, and Jenny, happily unconscious of all that had been going on in her sister's mind, was already in bed and half-way through her first slumber when the door of communication between her room and Sybil's opened slowly and hesitatingly, and a white-robed figure stood for a moment or two faltering on the threshold, and then precipitated itself with a kind of rush towards the bed whence Jenny, disturbed by the opening of the door, was just lifting her head.

"Jenny," whispered the intruder's voice—a voice choked with tears—as two arms were thrown round the younger girl in the semi-darkness, and a wet cheek touched hers timidly; "Jenny; do wake up. I am so unhappy; I must come to you. Oh, Jenny! I can't marry Lion Ashleigh. I don't love him; I never did love him; and I won't marry him. Oh! do be kind and help me, for I am so miserable about

it; and unless you will tell him and mamma for me I don't know what to do."

Jenny felt cold all over. If she had been awakened by the sudden dashing of a pail of ice-cold water in her face, she could not have felt more utterly frozen than she was by the horror and dismay which struck through her at Sybil's words. That the latter had been foolish in allowing Gareth Vane to make his attentions to her noticed, and that Lion was not unreasonably vexed thereat, she had dimly surmised already; but this—this was something of which she had never even dreamed; and for a moment she almost fancied that it was indeed some horrible nightmare from which she should awake to thank God for its unreality. Alas! the tender, creeping moonbeams, stealing in through the branches of rose and honeysuckle which framed the window, showed her the open door of Sybil's room with the yellow lamplight within, the dress she had taken off hanging across a chair, the ivory brushes and combs scattered about on the dressing-table, more clearly still the fair dishevelled head half hidden in the bed-clothes at her side, and the small cold hand clasping her shoulder in pitiful entreaty. Was her sister delirious then?

"Sybil—hush!" she said, sitting up and putting one arm round the other girl, as the latter half knelt, half crouched by the bedside. "What do you mean? Have you been dreaming? Dear, you can't know what you say."

"Yes, but I do," Sybil moaned. The warm contact of Jenny's protecting arm was comforting to her; but she still kept her face hidden. "I have been wanting to tell you all day; but I knew you would be so shocked, and I could not, before mamma; only, Jenny, it must be known sooner or later, and I can't help it. It has been a mistake all along; but it was Lion's own fault for making me engage myself to him."

"Lion's fault!" cried Jenny. The enormity of the thing fairly took away her breath. She almost shook her sister. "Sybil, I cannot understand you. 'A mistake!' What was a mistake? Not your engagement? Oh! my dear, what can you be thinking of? Who has put this into your head? It can't have come to you of itself."

"Why not?" said Sybil. She was still crying, but there was a touch of petulance in her grief. She had known that Jenny would be terribly shocked and angry with

her; she was prepared for that; but this utter incredulity was annoying; it made her conduct look so much worse and necessitated so much repetition.

"Plenty of other people have made mistakes before, and I am no worse than they. I could not help it, and I am very sorry; but it would be still worse to marry a man whom one did not love. You would not do that yourself."

"I?" exclaimed Jenny; but then a little gleam of hope came to her, and she added more collectedly. "Sybil, I know what this means. You are not in earnest. There has been some little quarrel between you and Lion. It was last night, was it not? He was vexed with you for staying out in the garden. Perhaps he thought it was not wise, and spoke a little hastily. Dear Sybil, tell me if it wasn't so. I wouldn't ask you if you hadn't said all this. I know you wouldn't like to tell even me if you were vexed with him; but do think how much worse what you are saying is. A mistake! your love for Lion, our own good, true Lion, who loves you so dearly and who has grown to be just like a son to mamma, and a very own brother to me, just through his caring for you—you cannot mean that!"

"Yes; that is just it," said Sybil, still in the same petulant tone. "You were always exalting him, and then mamma set her mind on having him for a son, and what could I do? It was you who made it up between you. It is all your doing, and I have given way; but—but"—bursting into tears again—"I cannot go on with it any longer. No, not even if you both turn against me; and he will not want me to do so when he knows the truth. It would be wicked of him if he did."

"The truth!" Jenny repeated much shocked. "But what is the truth? When have you learnt that you did not love Lionel? You loved him nearly a year ago when he asked you to marry him. You loved him yesterday. What has put this fancy into your head?"

Sybil hesitated a moment.

"It is no fancy" she said falteringly. "I was fond of him in a way. I thought I loved him; but I was wrong. I did not know—I did not know what love was."

"And do you know now?" asked Jenny wonderingly. Her face went all over a sudden burning red. This pure, upright, virginal young creature felt as if she had received a sudden blow, as if a soil had fallen on her mind. She loosened her sister's arms, and tried to look into her



face. "Who has taught you, then? Sybil, for pity's sake be angry with me, scold me, if I am wrong; but only say it is not that Mr. Vane."

For a whole minute, as it seemed to the younger girl, Sybil was silent. Then a quick warm light came into her eyes, a soft flame to her cheeks, kindling and irradiating the whole face with an inexpressible glow and sweetness till even her shrinking slender figure seemed to gather strength and glory.

"Yes," she said, very clearly and softly, "it is Gareth Vane. You must not say anything against him, please, for he loves me too. He has told me so. That is why I never want to see Lionel again."

For the first time in her life Jenny recoiled from her sister. For the first time in her life she felt the clasp of those pretty hands, heard her speak in those low tender tones, and felt no sympathy for her. For the first time in her life she recognised the exquisite beauty and winsomeness with no thrill of pleasure or admiration. She did not speak at all for a minute, and then she drew herself away from Sybil's grasp, covering her face with both her hands, and said, with a depth of shame and sorrow in her voice which would have touched a stone:

"See him again! Oh, poor Lionel! poor Lionel! If you had been dead to-night, and he had to see you so, it would have been bad enough; but this—" and there she broke off with a great choking sob, and Sybil made no answer; only cried a little, very softly, and shivered, and felt without those protecting arms as if she were suddenly left to herself, and was very cold, and unhappy, and badly used. It seemed too cruel to be true that Jenny, Jenny her ever loyal servant and shadow, should turn away from her so. Even her worst fears had not foreboded such a judgment as this; and her head sank, her whole slender supple figure shrank and drooped beneath it, and only the strange new-born passion and reality of her love for Gareth prevented her from pulling her sister's hands down, and begging her not to say such things, for she had only been joking, and Lionel need never even know of the jest. It was a severe trial for a nature physically and essentially soft and cowardly; but she did love Gareth, and that love, true in itself though false to another, pure in constitution though a sin in its direction, upheld her. He was unworthy of it. It was the curse of her young life; a curse already begun, and marring all the sweetness and placidity

of its course; but even in crushing, it elevated her, and from that hour to the one when she lay white and cold within her coffin, she never by word or thought repudiated it.

Even at present, however, her silence and tears were pleading for her. Jenny had no sooner spoken than the terribleness of her own words smote on her. Dead! Was it true that Lion or she could better bear to see Sybil, their own cherished darling, shut away from them for ever, and buried beneath the cold grave-clods, than fallen from herself by even such infidelity as this? And even if it were true, could it be right or wise to put a judgment so harsh into words, when it might not be too late, by pleading and persuasion, to hinder the falling at all? Impetuous in all her movements, she turned suddenly and threw her arms again round Sybil, drawing her up against her own warm bosom with a clasp as tight and passionate as though she would have held her there from all the world.

"Sybil—dear, dear Sybil, forgive me for saying that," she pleaded. "You were not in earnest. You don't know your own feelings. Oh! do think a little before you grieve everyone—Lionel and our mother, above all, by such a fancy as this. Who is this Mr. Vane? How many times have you ever seen him? What do we know of him at all—except as a handsome man with a habit of saying flattering and cynical things in the same breath, and a name even here for being fast and reckless? No; don't push me away. I am not saying anything against him. It is enough for me that he has been capable of making love to you, a woman already engaged—all but married. There is no need to say any more; and, dear Sybil, think of it yourself, that is what you are. For more than ten months you have been Lion's promised wife. This is June already, and in August you are going to be married; and only the other day mother and I were thinking it was time to fix a day for our trip to London about your clothes. Why, Lion has been busy for weeks back over the alterations he is having made in the vicarage to improve it for you. His whole life is wrapped up in you. If you were his wife already, he could not love you more fondly, or confide in you more fully; and you—how could you bear to look him in the face and tell him that you are going to do this base and unwomanly thing: that you care for another man, a man you have hardly



seen a dozen times; and that all his love and faithfulness, even the solemn promise you have given, are nothing to you? Oh! my dear, you couldn't do it. You couldn't fall so low from all truth and honesty. I know you better than you know yourself, and I'll tell you what it is. You have been foolish and a little weak, for you have liked this man and let him say flattering things to you; and now because he has fallen in love with you, you are frightened and think that it is your fault, and that because you've let him lead you a little bit wrong you must go further still, and break your troth and poor Lionel's heart. But that is all a mistake. Can't you see it yourself, now that you are away from Mr. Vane, and not blinded by his sophistries? Oh! do be brave and reasonable, do, my own darling sister. Put that man away from you, and make up your mind not to meet him again, or let him bewitch you further. Think of it, Sybil. Think of the love in Lionel's eyes when he looks at you. Think how near you are to being his wife, and how sacred a thing is your engagement to him; and promise me, promise now for his sake, and your own, and all of us, that you won't even remember, if you can help it, what you said just now."

But Sybil would not promise; neither would she argue. Argument was not her "forte," indeed; and all the little vehemence of which she was capable had been expended in her first outburst. Jenny's words, pleading, tender, choked with tears, full of fire and passion, touched her gently and made her own flow in answer, but never even grazed her will. It is not your fervent enthusiastic natures which gain the day, but those soft, quiet, silken-slipped ones, which seem as if any hand could fashion them to whatever form it pleased. Sybil was not angry with her sister for lecturing her. She still clung to her, taking a small physical consolation from her warmth and the support of her arms, even in the midst of her sorrow; but all she said was:

"I cannot help it. If it is wrong to break with Lionel, it would be worse to marry him knowing that I love some one else; and I shall never love any one but Gareth now. You do not know what love is. I did not, till I knew him. That is how I know I never really cared for Lion: never at all. But, oh! Jenny, be kind to me still; and tell mamma for me. She must know; and I cannot bear the har-

things I know she will say of him. I might say something bad to her in return. Dear Jenny, do be good and help me."

And in the end Jenny was persuaded to agree, so far as telling their mother was concerned; though it was a long time before she gave in even that much: not until the silver moon, travelling slowly through the watches of the night, had passed away altogether from the latticed window where the honeysuckles were tapping in the breeze, and had left the sisters in darkness save for that yellow gleam of lamplight from the inner room.

"God help and comfort Lionel when he hears of it," she said at last. "If you can bear to think how lonely and desolate his life must be from this night forth, I cannot. Oh! my dear, I have no other sister but you. I can't forsake you whatever you do; but I never thought it was in you to forsake him."

Yet before Sybil left her she had promised to soften the news as much as she could to their mother, and even to plead for her indulgence to the wilful pair who were breaking through all she held most sacred to come together; and when the elder girl crept back again to her own room, it was with a less heavy heart than she had left it a couple of hours before; and this night she slept sweetly and soundly, while Jenny lay awake, weeping bitter tears of shame and sorrow for the wrong-doing which she had no power to prevent.

Mrs. Dysart proved, however, less tender-hearted than her younger daughter. At first the shock of Jenny's news seemed to petrify her; and the girl was horrified to see her turn deadly white, press one hand upon her heart, and sink back upon the sofa as though she were fainting. She was conscious, however, for she held the girl's hand to prevent her from rushing for assistance or restoratives, and continued to clutch it tightly until she was able to articulate.

"It is not true. It cannot be. Sybil—my daughter—guilty of such shameful wickedness! Sybil in love with another man, wanting to throw off—Nonsense! She is not capable of it. This is some exaggerated fancy of your own. You were always fanciful, Jenny; but you should not say things like that to frighten me so. Send Sybil here herself. No, I don't want to hear another word from you. Send her to me." And when, in obedience to the message Jenny had no resource but to deliver, Sybil arrived, looking prettier and sweeter than usual in her trembling humility

and tearfulness, Mrs. Dysart had quite recovered, and fairly laughed in her face as she told her that she had heard some foolish wicked rhodomontade about her and a Mr. Vane; and desired her to contradict it at once.

This, however, Sybil would not do. Perhaps the withering contempt in her mother's tone roused even her gentle spirit, for, to Jenny's surprise, she answered with actual warmth.

"Mamma, I am very sorry, but I cannot. I knew you would be angry; but it is not my fault. I do love Mr. Vane; I cannot help it; and I have told him so."

"Then, my dear, sit down and write to him at once that you were out of your senses when you so far forgot all womanliness and decency, but that now you have come to them again, and never mean to see him or have any further intercourse with him. Good Heavens, that a child of mine should have so degraded herself! I pray that Lionel may never hear of this. I doubt, if he did, whether even his affection would induce him to forgive you and make you his wife. For his sake, however, we will hush it up; and you will go with me to London to-morrow to make arrangements about your wedding-clothes. There must be no more delay."

Sybil flushed crimson.

"Lion knows already, mamma. I wrote to him the first thing this morning, and told him that I could not marry him, and why. He will not want to force me to do so, he is too manly; but if he did it would be no use. I am very sorry to vex you; and of course if you forbid me to marry Gareth Vane I will not disobey you; but I shall never love anybody else. I shall wait, and be true to him, all the same."

Mrs. Dysart looked at her without speaking. There was an unusual glow and warmth about Sybil, and a gleam in her eyes which made her quite different from her ordinary self, and gave her a certain resoluteness and force of expression which she had never had before. Gazing at her

the mother's face grew livid even to the lips, the lines seemed to deepen on her brow, and her cheeks to become more hollow. She sat perfectly silent till Sybil had quite ceased, then said very low as if to herself:

"It has come." Her eyes closed for a moment, and she shivered. Then she looked at Sybil, and added quite coldly and slowly: "In that case I have nothing more to say to you. I shall not change my mind. When you change yours I shall believe you are my daughter. At present I have only one." And rising, she took Jenny's arm, and walked out of the room and up to her own, with stiff, dragging steps. She did not come down again the rest of that day, and Sybil spent the greater part of it in tears; but the resolution of neither wavered. Mrs. Dysart refused to speak to her daughter again until the latter submitted, or to allow Gareth to enter her doors. She tore in half a letter which (at Sybil's entreaty) he wrote her, and returned it to him unread; and she forbade Jenny even to mention his name or her sister's in her hearing; yet still Sybil, though looking wretchedly pale and ill, held out; and not only adhered to her refusal to see Lionel again (though at first he was very urgent in his entreaty that she would do so), but seemed rather anxious than otherwise that the fact of her engagement being broken off should be known as speedily as possible.

It was a very wretched time at Hillbrow. The dark cloud of trouble and dissension had broken at last over the quiet, happy little household; and even the servants felt the shadow of it, and went about their work with stealthy steps and saddened faces.

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